

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
LAWRENCE**

**INFORMANT: EDWIN BUTHMAN
INTERVIEWER: YILDEREY ERDENER
DATE: OCTOBER 6, 1988**

**E = EDWIN
Y = YILDEREY**

SG-LA-T519

Tape begins with Edwin in the middle of a conversation:

E: And we lived there quite a few years. Well not, no, not so many. I didn't live there so long. (Y: Yeah) And we bought a farm in Methuen. (Y: Farm?) A farm. Cows and horses, and everything. (Y: Yeah) We had a, we had some lumber men come in and cut down the forest, you know, and we worked, I went five, I went to school five miles to school. And um, see, my mind isn't so very strong with my sickness. So my mind is deteriorating somewhat.

Y: Well so far I did not notice much of anything.

E: Well, well.

Y: But since I don't know you earlier years, I cannot make a comparison, you know? (E: No) So uh, this farm is probably now Methuen Mall, or something.

E: Yeah, it's been taken over with house lots now. That was up in Methuen.

Y: Yeah. Is the house still there?

E: No.

Y: They tore it apart?

E: It's all new settlement there. You wouldn't know it. Hundreds of houses (Y: yeah) are in there now. And uh, (--)

Y: Do you know how your parents met each other? They came here to work at the Textile

Mills?

E: Yeah, I suppose so. (Y: Yeah) I think so. (Y: Yeah) My, my family were weavers. [pause] (Y: Yeah) They were here. Well, there was textile center, and he was a weaver. Weaving was a little higher standard. It tended, it took a little more, a little more experience, a little more know how. (Y: Skills?) Skill. (Y: Yeah) Thank you. And well, and then I was, I was eleven years old at the time of the strike. I'm afraid I can't be giving you very much. I don't know too much. (Y: That's all right) I was only eleven years old. (Y: That's all right) But I was, I was in, I've been in it all my life (Y: Yeah). I went to work when I was fourteen.

Y: How did you decide? I mean why did you quite school?

E: Well we needed the money. (Y: Yeah) In those days everybody didn't go to high school, and college. (Y: Right) College was quite an exception to go.

Y: Yeah. And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

E: I had, I had two brothers and a sister.

Y: Two brother, one sister and two brothers.

E: One sister and two brothers.

Y: So altogether four?

E: Yeah. (Y: with you?) Yeah. Yes, yes. Four. Thank you. Well see I don't remember much about (--) I was aware of it as a boy. I remember the militia being here. That always makes quite an impression on a boy, especially soldiers.

Y: How did you see them? I mean you are going to school.

E: Yes, I don't know. I must have got in touch with them somehow, or other. I was eleven, but (Y: yeah). I know my parents would take me down and show me things. Of course my father was a weaver, and he was out of work. I think the strike lasted about two, two months. I'm not sure. There's a lot of recruit information about that anyway. (Y: Yeah) And uh, I think there was one, I think there was one fatality (Y: Umhm) in, on the strike. And I think the issue was, I think the laws changed from 54 hours a week to 48. And I think the management, the management expected to pay for 48 hours work. The people didn't want that. They wanted the 54 hours, I'm not authority on this. I don't know much about it. (Y: Yeah) I think they wanted, they wanted the regular 54 hours even though we only worked 48. (Y: Umhm) So it amounted to very little. They got so much in those days anyway. (Y: Yeah) And I think I have some pictures of the Militia here, I'm not sure.

Y: Yeah, it would be nice to see them. And your father was working at the mill at that time?

(E: Yes) And your mother working also?

E: No, my mother was not working. She was at home taking care of the kids, you know? And see, my mind has been affected with my sickness. (Y: Yeah) And it affected my memory more than anything else I think. I'm thankful I can still get about. But uh (--)

Y: Yeah. But it doesn't matter. You know, as much as you can remember, that's all right.

E: Thank you.

Y: But uh, I wonder what did your, did you hear any stories from your father? Or how did the strike affect your home, your family?

E: Well you see, in those days there was no unemployment compensation for(--) (Y: Yeah) And I hear stories of, they would be, people would be glad to go to the butcher shop and get the marrow bones just to make a soup. (Y: Yeah) And um, I'm not sure whether the City Hall gave two dollars a week to a family, some such thing. I'm not sure about that. (Y: Yeah) But I think they gave two dollars a week.

Y: For, per family?

E: Yeah, I don't know the exact details. (Y: Right, right. Right) But uh, I think that's what they got. And then my father, I don't understand it all. Of course I was only eleven years old. But the, but the family, we were held together because my father went to work in North Andover. It was the Bright Wood Mill, a small mill, and he went to weaver over there during the strike.

Y: But he was working uh (--)

E: Well he was on strike for two months.

Y: But he was working in the Wood Mill, or in where?

E: No, no, he went to the, he went to North Andover.

Y: Before, before he went to North Andover where was he working?

E: In the Washington Mills. (Y: Oh, I see) The Washington Mills. (Y: Uh huh) And he went to, as I say, he went Bright Wood. And part of the time he went to Winooski, Vermont. My brother was, my older brother was a weaver too. And the two of them went to Winooski, that's in Vermont. And that was quite an experience to have your father and big brother go off. I remember that much. And even as eleven years old it made quite an impact on me I think.

Y: How old was he, your older brother? How much older?

E: I guess he was about seven years older.

Y: Yeah. So he was seven, eighteen or so.

E: Something like that.

Y: Yeah. So did you have any financial problems at home, because of, or neighbors, or friends?

E: I don't remember. (Y: Yeah) I wouldn't know of course. (y: Yeah) I wouldn't know. But we had a mortgage on the house. And the woman, we didn't get it from a bank, we got it from some woman. She used to walk across the river. First of the month she'd come to collect the interest from her money. (Y: Hm) [pause] I don't, I don't, really I don't remember that much, you see?

Y: Well that's all right. So you, you were eleven years old and uh, a little boy. [clears throat] What can you remember?

E: You can't remember. No, you can hear, you hear. (Y: Right) [blows nose] You can hear things from your family. (Y: Right) We had hard times in those days. You know, I don't know just when the year was, but some years later I guess we couldn't meet the mortgage. You know, if you have a sickness, or something during that month you don't have any money. You had no insurance in that way. (Y: Yeah) Although we were insured with the, with John Hancock Insurance. You bought policies for five cents a week.

Y: When was that? When you were?

E: When I was a child.

Y: Uh huh.

E: We had policies five cents a week, or ten cents, or a quarter. And the insurance man came every week and collected. (Y: Every week) Yeah, if I remember. As far as I remember.

Y: But it was not from the mill. It was (--)

E: No, that was a private insurance. But that, I don't think, that wasn't any insurance like for unemployment or anything, or sickness. That was, I think that was straight death. I still have the policies. They've increased. I probably. I may be entitled to \$1,000. insurance from those baby, we called them baby policies.

Y: Um. What was the name? John Hancock?

E: John Hancock. That was the big insurance company. You know, they have the Hancock Building in Boston, and it's a very big financial enterprise. So, but there was no insurance like unemployment and, and those things.

Y: Yeah. And you started at the age of 14, so it was 1915 or so?

E: Yes, it was 15.

Y: Uh, where did you start working?

E: Well, a long story. My mother, I guess before she was married of course, they went to work at twelve years old. They worked twelve years, twelve weeks to school, and twelve weeks to work. And my mother knew a Mr. Whitehead, and he became boss spinner. Spinning, you understand spinning?

Y: In Washington Mill, or Wood Mill? It doesn't matter.

E: No, it doesn't matter, but anyway so she knew him from the time she worked. He was about the same age. And he, he became the boss spinner in the Wood Mill. The Wood Mill was the longest mill in the world. I think we employed about 12,000 people there. And he was boss spinner. So my mother went to him to get me a job.

Y: I thought your mother did not work, I understood?

E: Well she didn't, she didn't. But she had this friend that she worked there when she was younger. (Y: Oh) When she, when she went to work twelve years old. So he got me a job as a spinner. And the boys would, when the spinning was, when the bobbins were full we had to take the bobbins off and put new ones in. And I was there about a week or two, and I was made office boy of the big mill. I used to take pride in being able to say I was in every room in this house. They had underground tunnels, you know from under, under Union, under Union Street I guess, yeah? (Y: Yeah) To the Ayer Mill next door. And I'd been in the Ayer Mill. I always wanted, I was in every room in this big building. It was the biggest building in the world. It was the biggest mill. It's quite a change you see, from the biggest Textile Center in the world. I don't believe there's a loom in Lawrence, I don't think there's one loom in Lawrence. I don't think so. I don't think there's a single, and there were thousands. There were thousands of looms in Lawrence. And anyway, we, I can't think of it. My memory is terrible.

Y: Yeah, what did you do as an office boy. What was your job? What did they ask you?

E: Well I had, I did a little office work. Not much. But I did some office work. And I worked for the, I was in the Worsted Department. You know, in Textiles there's worsted and woolens. Are you familiar with them a little bit? No. Well worsteds, worsted are made from the long fibers, and the woolens are made from short fibers. There's a different process. The worsted [pause], thank you very much. That's very good. As I say, worsteds and woolens. And I worked, the Wood Mill had both, both woolen and worsted. There's a different process. You can't go into that process now, but there's a different process all together of making the threads. And I worked in the Worsted Yarn Department, yarn was, well yarn was threads and like it made the, put it on the different containers. And I used to take, he was the head of about 12 overseers. They called them overseers in those days. And I ran, he wrote notes to these people and I delivered them.

Y: Who was he you said?

E: What?

Y: Who was he?

E: Well he was uh, (Y: your father's uh) no, no, nothing to do with my father.

Y: No, I mean your mother's friend, or [unclear].

E: Friend. He was head, he was head of the spinning. (Y: Department) But there was all kinds of things. There was drawing, and sort of in this yarn department. And I was office boy for about two years. And then I went into the dye house, the dye house, and that's where I spent my life, in color. (Y: Oh) From fourteen years old. I went to, I went to night school. Night high. See I stopped at grammar, and then I went to night high, graduated from night high. And then I went to the Lowell Textile Mills. Lowell University I think it is. That used to be the Textile, old Textile School. They changed it. It's on a little higher status. And I must have gone up there about ten years, nights. It's quite a trying thing you see. We worked especially in the dye house. Dying was not a precise science. You never knew when the color was just going to come out right. It might take a little longer. You may have to add color to make it, to shade. So we work maybe six o'clock or something, and I, I had my, busy. And I took my lunch in my hand, and my lunch basket, and we went on the street cars. (Y: Yeah) And they were crowded, and people were hot, you know. And it was a very, hold on on a strap. You don't remember that. (Y: Yeah) You hold on a strap, you have a sandwich in your hand.

Y: How did you move from one department to another. I mean you started as a spinner, and then you said office boy.

E: I had, but I was, I had nothing to do with the manufacturing and that, I was office boy. (Y: Yeah) And that just, I ran errands.

Y: Right. But who made the decision to move you around from (--)

E: Well I think they needed somebody in the dye house office. So I went to the dye house office.

Y: So they asked you, do you want to work there, and they said yes?

E: Yeah, they (--) My superiors must have contacted the dye house superior, he needed somebody. (Y: Uh huh) I was there, well I was a dyer all my life. I went to night school. I went to MIT. I went to Boston College. I learned English, and Management, and Coloring, and Chemistry, and I learned all those things. So I went to school probably fifteen, twenty years nights. (Y: Always nights?) Always nights, yes.

Y: Can you tell me, so you started a spinning boy, and then office boy, and then how did you manage after work? How many hours did you work in those days?

E: Well that's it. I must have been healthy. I must have been healthy. Because we always started at six o'clock in the morning you might say. (Y: in the morning? Oh) We started early,

and for forty-eight hours, or forty-eight hours we got about, well I got about four dollars and a half for forty-eight hours. They get more than that for an hour now.

Y: What year more or less was that? (E: What?) In what year was that? 19 uh (--)

E: 1914. 1915. (Y: 15) I was getting about four dollars and forty cents, or something like that a week.

Y: And do you remember working forty-eight hours in those days?

E: Oh yes, yeah. And uh, (--)

Y: And then after you could, after work you came home and changed, went to school, or how did you do that?

E: Yes, went to school. Well that was, that was high school. I went to high school for four years. I hadn't been to high school. See, I graduated from high school nights. (Y: Yeah, right) And then I went to Textile School.

Y: Yeah, but uh, you are, did you speak your German at home?

E: Some. I didn't speak too much I don't think. But I understand German. I can understand German and I can speak it miserably. But uh, grammar wouldn't be right of course, but I can understand, and I'm thankful for that. I enjoy especially the hymns. The hymns I think, I don't know, I haven't read it or anything, but I know. I consider that in my limited knowledge, I've considered the hymns majestic. Probably the highest form of the English language there is I think. Lovely majestic ideas, and song. And I went to a German church. (Y: Where?) In the bottom of the hill here. And I had a Presbyterian church. It was the, it was the German Presbyterian church then. And so anyway, we, we were, we uh, yeah, and then quite a few years I intended, the sermons were always in German. I went to church and Sunday school, it was all German. We learned the, the ten commandments, and we learned the, all those things in German. Even the Lord's Prayer. And anyway, and I finally, and the war, well you see the war was in 1914 like you see. I was right in the war. And my old colleagues went to, went to war. And I was catapulted to boss dyer before I was ready. (Y: Umhm) I was a good boy, you know what I mean. I was a good boy in that sense, and some of my friends were, well they were good kids, but there was, they used to have gangs on the street. They weren't terrible, they were just [unclear] on the streets. They were the Apaches and the Ramblers, all over the city.

Y: Yeah, can you tell me a little bit more what they, what did they do? I mean as gangs, what uh (--)

E: Well they smoked, you know, and they, I don't remember too much about them, not too bad, but they, they sort of ran the neighborhood. They were the boss of that neighborhood.

Y: And you did not belong to those groups?

E: No, I was an innocent kid. I wouldn't, I was just an innocent kid I guess. And I worked, and they, they didn't want the higher jobs. They wanted to be out with the gang. But I, I took it. I wasn't ready. I was no dyer, you know. I didn't know anything about chemistry. But I had to learn. I learned over the, I went to school I bet twenty-two years or more. (Y: yeah) And so(--)

Y: So in your family your brother, what is his name, seven years old? Your brother's name who was seven years older than you? What was his name?

E: Charles.

Y: Charles. (E: Yeah) You, Charles and another boy? Another brother?

E: Another brother younger. Five years younger than I.

Y: What was his name? (E: Fred) And uh, your sister?

E: My sister Ella, she's eighty-three now. (Y: Ellis) Ella. (Y: Ella) Ella.

Y: All of them working at the mills, and your father also?

E: Yes. And my mother went to work too after awhile when we kids were (--) I suppose we were thirteen, fourteen, in there in that age. You see we had a mortgage. And we couldn't meet the mortgage. So my mother went to work. She went to work again to earn the money to make the mortgage.

Y: To pay the farm?

E: No, the farm, we moved from the farm back to Lawrence. (Y: Oh) Yeah. (Y: Yeah) So, but anyways we had trouble. You didn't have any, well I don't know, you didn't have any, I don't know what they had, but they didn't have any money and they to, she had to go to work to make up, to be able to pay the mortgage.

Y: I was, I'm confused. Did you buy first the farm in Methuen, and then the house in Lawrence? Or the other way around?

E: Uh, no, we uh, we were born in Methuen, and we went to the farm then as a kid. (Y: Yeah) There were nine grades in one room, and one teacher. One teacher. That was common in those days. We were up the farm quite awhile. We had cows, and we had a milk route. We used to deliver milk, and eggs, and chickens, and not great, you know, but enough to hold us together I suppose. I doubt if they own the farm. I don't, I wonder if they did. I don't know, but they (--)

SIDE I ENDS

SIDE II BEGINS

E: ...then we came back to Lawrence and lived over in near the Lawrence [playsted] on

Lawrence Street.

Y: Lawrence Street?

E: Playsted, the athletic field. (L: Uh huh. Oh, oh I see) We lived near there.

Y: That was the house you, you were making mortgage payments?

E: Yes.

Y: That was the house?

E: Yeah.

Y: Yeah.

E: And then we came, and we finally, and we got a house in South Lawrence near the Wetherbee School. The Wetherbee School was one of the first schools in town here, named after the first woman president of the Lawrence Women's Club. Quite a poetic, traveling, wonderful person.

Y: So you sold then the house in Lawrence Street, and moved to the other house?

E: Yes. (Y: I see) And well we, we lived there then the rest of our time. My mother and father died there, and I, I've been married over sixty years here. And we had this house, we cut it in half, made a duplex. And I've lived on this side, and my wife's sister lived on the other side. So I've been occupied, see I must have had good health, because I worked long hours. The dye house was not a precise science. It was, it was difficult. But I liked it. So I went to school nights. I don't know how many, about twenty two years all together. I went to Boston and learned English. And (--)

Y: What do you mean learn English? You knew English.

E: Yeah, but I, I didn't have it like, I didn't have high school.

Y: You took courses in English, right?

E: Courses in English.

Y: Writing and so forth?

E: Yeah. Regular, regular high school stuff I would say.

Y: Right, right. Uh huh.

E: And uh (--)

Y: And when you started as fourteen years old young boy, did, did work, working in the Wood Mill change somehow the relationship at home? I mean you became the little person who had a job, who could bring money, and uh (--)

E: Well but you see, in those days we gave up our money until we were twenty-one.

Y: Gave up who? To your mother, father?

E: My mother, father? We got spending money. We got whatever, a small amount, as much as they could afford. I had to go to work to help with the mortgage. But we got spending money. We weren't independent. Now I'm [unclear], no, we were, we had spending money.

Y: Yeah. I mean were you proud that you had the job now, you could help?

E: I was happy. I don't agree with all this terrible, terrible situation of child labor. I never saw that. I never saw any of that. I think that was, somebody has stretched that I think. We were happy to get what we got. We were happy for a dollar. A dollar was a dollar, and we were happy to have it. And we didn't, we didn't know about the affluence of today. So we, we were content I think. I was so busy.

Y: With school and working, you did not (--)

E: And then I, then at twenty-five, I was twenty-four years old, I started the troop, the Boy Scout Troop. And that was a full time job you might say. I had boys up there, I have about twenty-five lectures I give, develop. I love to talk and I wasn't, I wasn't educated. So I felt I never would, never would learn enough. I had to make up. I was making up all my life you see? (Y: Yeah) But it was, it was really, life was never boring. (Y: Yeah) But then I had the dye house job. I'd work until six in the morning, maybe seven, quarter to seven. And I had a Scout Meeting at seven. I had eighty boys. And you know it takes your vitality, and patience. I did it out of the love of God. I wanted to do something that matters for God. It was my incentive, (Y: Right) which was a permanent one. And uh, so I worked for, I was very busy in the dye house. Saturdays and Sundays, and all kind of hours. And yet I ran the Troop. I'd come home from Troop meeting and sit in the kitchen an hour planning the next meeting. You know, pulling that together. But I had a very patient wife. She was a very fine Christian woman. She was my Sunday school teacher, and she was twenty years older. And I married her. And we were together, well we celebrated our 50th Anniversary, which was a blessing all those years to be able to celebrate. And she was a wonderful help.

Y: When did you get married?

E: When I was twenty-five.

Y: Twenty-five and uh (--)

E: That's about twenty, about twenty, in the year '25, around there. (Y: yeah) '25, '26.

Y: And you were living with your parents at that time? (E: Yes, yes) Which was in (E: South Lawrence) South Lawrence. And then you moved out, or she came in?

E: Oh no, I moved in here with her parents, my wife's parents, my wife's father.

Y: Oh, in this house here?

E: In this house.

Y: Oh you came her, joined to their family?

E: Yeah, I married and lived here. And she, we lived in her father's apartment. (Y: Yeah) And let's see, he uh, well he lived with us about four or five years. Then he died. He was quite old.

Y: Did he work at Textile?

E: No. Well he learned the Textile business in Germany. (Y: Oh) And he came here to be in the Textile Centers in Lawrence. But he was, that was his bringing up. And there was a great slump, hard times. The mills were closed and all of these men went to different, different direction, different professions. (Y: Yeah) This one man, and in German we called him, I don't know, and then he went in to stationary store. Another man went on a farm. They called him, "farm weisner." And another was the upper taker, was the [unclear], not the [unclear], the apothecary. And we called him by that, weisner. One was ash, one was an ash man. They all went into different professions. And my father, my father-in-law, he went to, he went into the grain business. See the streets at that time, when even in my time, they weren't paved. They were all dirt roads. We had a barn. We still have the barn. The barn has been used these sixty five years for Boy Scouts. See, we, we take, we've had eight, we've had eighty boys in the troop. And it was quite a job to manage them and train them. And we probably have the, we were probably the, I hesitate to say it, but we were probably as successful a Troop as there was. We had about 90 eagles, which is a quite a good number.

Y: Did your wife, she did not complain that you worked late hours?

E: That's what I'm, I'm thankful. See I'm thankful to her for her patiences. She was a very intelligent woman. (Y: Yeah) She started the Lawrence Women's Club, Garden Club. She was a fine woman, a lady. And uh, (--)

Y: So you worked until quarter to seven, seven you said at the dying room, and then you went there.

E: Then I'd run up there and get changed. She'd be all ready. She'd had it all lined up for me, you know. And it's wonderful. I'm sorry I'm emotional, but that's my sickness, that's my sickness.

Y: No, that's uh, well that's fine.

E: My sickness. (Y: That's fine) I'm thankful I'm here that's all. So it was a wonderful thing, and I could come home. You know when you have eighty boys, you have problems. Not great, but I was a patient, sort of a loving sort of a guy I think. And I'd come home and I could sit here and tell her all about what happened. We'd have somebody to tell about, [unclear], not complaining. She'd have my supper all ready. And she really put up with a lot. And I taught, we had merit badges in the Boy Scouts. Were you ever a Boy Scout?

Y: Yeah, well for a short while, yes.

E: Yeah. Well we had merit badges. And I had the merit badge of uh(--) You want something?

Y: No, I am looking for another tape. Yeah. I'm listening to you.

E: I was in, I was a merit badge examiner in astronomy. (Y: Uh huh) And also in, in geology. (Y: Uh huh) And I talked to kids, maybe all winter I'd have a class once a week in astronomy or in rocks. And I'd have twenty kids in the kitchen. My wife would be sitting here, and sometime [unclear], you just uh, my wife would go out and sit down. She said listen, she'd grab him by the shoulder, and she'd say, listen to the Scout Master. You know, they were getting a little (--) I, I was sort of a manager you might say, in scouting. I was the Scout Master, I was the leader. (Y: Yeah) Y had a lot of wonderful help. My assistants. I had so many good assistants and they were willing to work. We never had a quarrel. We, and we [unclear] about everything. We were all from this area. There were Germans, and they were rather proficient I think. And we'd get all the prices from rallies like, you know. Competition and signaling, and camping, and all of the. So and then I'd have classes in astronomy here, a couple of hours, and then other classes. And I appreciate her to this day. She was patient with me, and then say, well say, when are you going to give me a little time? But that was not true. She was cooperative with me. She was helpful. And so I was very helpful, very happy that way.

Y: Did you have children?

E: No, I didn't have any children. She, my wife was about forty-five when I married her. She was twenty years older than I was. (Y: Umhm) But we were very happy together. We were compatible. We went to all the nice things in Andover, in Boston, and we really lived a happy life. And our life was mostly in the church.

Y: Yeah, you had also eighty boys. I mean you did not need any more.

E: No, I didn't need any.

Y: Yeah, and can you tell me a little bit about the dying room, or the dye house where you worked. What did you do, and uh (--)

E: Well I started to say that the war came in. And the war took all the younger men. And it left the younger ones. We had boss dyer jobs before we were ready. You know, we were young, under twenty. I was boss dyer when I was about twenty. And but I didn't know much. But I was, I was a good boy. And I, I didn't insist on the wild life of, of the evening. I worked. And

so I learned a lot, I studied a lot. I bet I went to night school twenty-five years, I'm sure. Not only dying, but everything. (Y: Umhm) Wait a minute, where was I now?

Y: The dying house.

E: Oh yeah. And in the dye house the men, all the men were all going away to war. So I, I was eager to learn. I wasn't the smartest of all. I wasn't that smart, but I was a hard worker. And I was willing to do things. So they were matching off the colors, and I get right in there and learn more and more. And I take something like this and do it myself, you know, put the dye on, make it, change the shade. At rather a young age I was, I was boss dyer. (Y: Boss dyer?) They called it boss dyer those days.

Y: You were the boss of the (--)

E: I was the boss dyer. And then I was with the Wood Mill for many years. I was assistant. I was boss dyer of a certain kind of dying. That was the wool dyer, you know, before, not, not in the cloth. There were different divisions. I was boss of the wool dying you might say. (Y: Umhm) Well then I moved to the Ayer Mill, the Ayer Mill, the one with the clock on it. (Y: Why?) I was boss dyer over there. I was on assistant at the Wood, but I was boss dyer at the Ayer Mill from oh, I don't know, twenty years maybe. (Y: Yeah) And then the American, the Textile industry left Lawrence you see. I don't want to be biased, or prejudiced, I don't know, but I think, mostly you see, well during the war American Woolen probably produces 65% to 70% of all the garments in the war.

Y: First World War? World War I?

E: World War I. We were the first ones. And then I was a dyer, and that was World War II, both, well both. World War II. And I had to go to Philadelphia. The Philadelphia was the Quarter Master for the United States Army. Big, big enterprise. And I went there about every two or three weeks, I went there with my colors. You see, when I went to Philadelphia, by train in those days.

Y: Why did you go there?

E: I had to get the colors approved. (Y: Oh I see.) You see? And uh, sometime you'd have the whole mill full of one shade. And if that went wrong, your whole mill was gone. It was a very trying situation for me. I had to go there with, as nice as I could be. And yet I had to get my shades past. You know. I never bribed anybody. I never handed out money to get paid. But I was very nice to them. I had Jehovah's Witnesses there who were in charge of the cloth. And I had every Protestant and Catholic, whatever they might be. And I always listened well. And I was a Christian myself. And I, I went to their masses, and I went to their missions. The Catholic Church has a mission, maybe sometime once a week. And I went, although I got to be a real friend of those people.

Y: Yeah, who approved them. Who approved the shades?

E: They had a regular shade room there. (Y: The army, or what?) In the army. Oh yeah, it was army. (Y: Yeah. Umhm) But they weren't all army people that worked there. There were other people, but the army controlled it. It was the, it was the Quarter Master of the United States Army in Philadelphia. So anyway, so we, we produced 65 to 70%. And I took, I got in real good there. I was very friendly and I went to church went them at night. And as I say, I never paid them any money. I never bribed them. Some people did, but I never did. And mine was friendliness. But I had a terrific job. I had to, I wanted to keep friends. I had millions of dollars worth of cloth that I had to get past. And they had to be nice to me. And sometime people got a job like for color, They couldn't see. If it wasn't perfect they wouldn't take it. You know, there was no precise science like that. You had to be, anybody could say, that's okay, I'll take it, or I won't take it. You have to be flexible. You have to be a little bit flexible and allow this shade, or this much, you know?

Y: What color was that?

E: Mostly khaki. (Y: Coky?) Khaki.

Y: Khaki was the green kind, cloth?

E: Olive like. Olive. (Y: Olive green?) Olive green.

Y: And you couldn't always catch the right color?

E: No, you see, you dyed it in the wool. When it was wool you dyed it. And then you spun it and all that. And if it was all done, then wool, well there you had it. You see, you couldn't do much with it. You had to of, oh, I don't know. I had to be the world's best diplomat. Sometime in New York, the big office in New York, they couldn't get it past. Where they went in there arrogant. See, they went in there, come on now, pass this, I'm the American Woolen Company. Well they didn't get anywhere. They gave up, gave it to me, and I went in and got it past, because I knew them. (Y: Yeah) I took them to (--) Do you remember (--) How long have you been here? (Y: one year) Where did you come from? (Y: California) Oh, I see. Well in those days [Cony Mack?], you don't remember baseball, but [Cony Mack?] was the, well probably the best known ball player or manager in the world you might say. Even though in the dugouts where they, where they played ball and he had the high collar up to here. I used to take them to ball games and take them to dinner, and things like that. And I stayed in their house. You know, we were like good friends. And even after the war, after I quit, I still kept up these relationships with them. (Y: Yeah)

So, so it was a very trying time. You got there with millions of dollars worth of stuff you had to get it past. Sometimes I couldn't show it to them. Certain colors looked different in different days, sunny days. And the standard was probably, looked good on a certain day. So I went to the Museums, Philadelphia is full of museums. The statue, you know.

Y: You know, some colors would look different here than outside.

E: Oh yes, and you know, I had (--) I knew that, so I'd take the day off and go around to museums that day. Wait for a good day. But I was very successful in getting the colors past.

Mostly because of my, my real genuine friendship with the, with these people and the families. And they liked [unclear], and I'd take them out.

Y: Yeah. How did you feel about the Americans were fighting against the Germans? I mean you were uh (--) Didn't you feel(--)

E: Well I really wasn't that German. I was, we were, we were in the German Church. (Y: Yeah) And we had some (Y: concerns) discomfort. People, you know, are ignorant, and they, trying to make it hard for Germans. (Y: Right) But we managed to get along. They changed.

Y: I think in those days I was told that the language in the church shifted from German to English.

E: Oh yeah, we, we finally, we finally changed to English.

Y: I mean I understand that it was because of the [unclear] with Hitler, people did not want to, some people, some churches did not want to, some people, some churches did not want to (--)

E: Could have been. I don't know. We weren't we didn't do it for that reason. We, it just [unclear] kids grew up and they didn't understand the language. And we wanted them to hear the sermons. And so we changed. Even in the Sunday school it was all German. We learned the books of the bible in German, and but we changed then. And then our soldiers, when they were in the war, they, we changed from the German Presbyterian Church, to United Presbyterian Church. It was, kids, it's difficult for them to take it. (Y: Yeah)

Y: So uh, you are the good person to ask, because uh, about the changes, because you started in uh, you started in 19 (E: 14) 15, 14. (E: Yes) And then uh, continued until 19 (--)

E: Well I've been retired fourteen years now. Fifteen years, '65 to '75. I retired at '65.

Y: Yeah. Uh, what I was going to say, what changes did you see in the mills in terms of technology, or where you worked?

E: Well yes, the dying was always done in wooden, in wooden, wooden, wooden kettles. Now when I left there was mostly stainless steel kettles. (Y: Umhm) It was a big concern in North Andover that it build stainless steel. And we gradually, one stainless steel after another. And when I left they were almost all stainless steel.

Y: What [unclear] make uh, in wooden, or uh (--)

E: The dye kettles. The dye kettles. You dye, you dye as many as sixteen pieces, 80 yards long. Each piece 80 yards long. You dye sixteen of those pieces in the wooden kettle. And they went over a drum, you might say, with humps on it, wooden humps, so as they'd have some traction, and could drag them out of the water, into the water, dying them. And uh, and then of course I'm not a weaver. My parents were all weavers. My family. But they, they improved liked everything else, you know. They, and they could run so many more looms, because they were

more efficient, they'd almost run by themselves. Not completely, but (--) I was in that change when they changed the wooden kettles to stainless steel ones. And washing the washers, there were sixteen pieces, you know, with soap, and wash them, and therefore we always had our problem. They dye wouldn't come out right some time. It would be uneven.

Y: What did you do in that case?

E: Well we had to struggle along in this way. I would blame the man that washed them. He didn't wash them clean, and that would cause my dye to go on wrong. And you couldn't prove it. But you had to, you had to be alert all the time. You were, all the time you were concern. It isn't like selling shoes. You sell five pair of shoes, and you got five, some left. And that wasn't the case of dying. Some days they came out great, and another day it wouldn't.

Y: What did you do with that product? I mean if it did not come out correct?

E: Well we had, some of them, the lighter shades that were like that, we have to dye them into a darker shade. Dye them into a darker shade. Um, but Lowell gee, you go up there in a streetcar and you come home in a streetcar. And you, you go to work at six o'clock in the morning. Take you an hour to get up there in a streetcar, and an hour to get home. It was ten, eleven o'clock when you got back to Lawrence. It was a terrific thing.

Y: You took the streetcars always to work?

E: Yeah. Well yes. We didn't have a car. I didn't have a car until I was married five years. They weren't, they weren't so common in those days.

Y: No, I know.

E: The idea, the streets weren't paved. They tell me, somebody was telling me that they used to pave the streets near the high school in wood, so there wouldn't be so much noise and disturb the kids learning. But that was true I guess. I don't remember that, but I was told by some of the old timers.

Y: What was the name of the, of the streetcars? Belt, Belt Line, or something?

E: We had a Belt Line. The Belt Line ran over Essex Street, over the Bridge, and out some distance, maybe way up to Andover Street. (Y: Umhm) And that was a Belt Line, you see? See, that was a change too. That in those days every kettle, every loom had a special motor, but no, no, it was wrong. They ran on a pulley. You might have well, wouldn't you say 100 looms. 100 looms for weaving. And uh, you had a big, big motor. Oh, half the height of this room, on the ceiling. And that generated the power, and that had a big, a big belt maybe that wide. And probably twenty feet long. And that ran other little pulleys. And it went along for quite a distance, all these little, then there was a shaft on the ceiling, and everyone had a pulley. And then if you, and it had a loose pulley, and a tight pulley. When it was on a tight pulley every loom would run, but when you wanted to stop it you switched the belt and seize the smaller belt from the big belt started the smaller belts. And each kettle, each loom had a special loose pulley

and a tight pulley. You wanted it to run you moved it on the tight pulley. The tight pulley would run it. And a loose pulley would be idle. See, it wouldn't, it wouldn't pull anything. (Y: Yeah) And then the change came. I think every loom had, had a motor of it's own.

Y: So how did it affect individual workers there?

E: Not so much. It was just that I know a couple of my friends died with those belts breaking. He used a belt like that, and it broke. And it hit the person, almost killed him. They don't always. But if you were in the wrong way, if you were in the wrong place at the wrong time you would be killed, you know?

Y: I mean you knew those people who died?

E: I knew several of them, yeah.

Y: Several. You meant more than two?

E: No, I remember two of them a least. And uh, of course it [few words unclear].

Y: Yeah. It was in dye house? Those people dyed uh (--)